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The Effects of Brand Communication and Service Quality In Building Brand Loyalty Through Brand Trust; The Empirical Research On Global Brands

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Abstract

Brands are important in the consumer markets. They are the interface between consumers and the company, and consumers may develop trust and loyalty to brands. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of brand communication and service quality in building brand loyalty through brand trust. The present study explores the relationship among brand communication and service quality in a relational context with an emphasis on understanding of the linking role of brand trust and loyalty. Overall consideration, automotive industry was selected as the relational exchange context for this research. Data were collected through random questionnaires from the randomly selected 258 consumers. The study was based on the development and administration of a self-administered survey and conducted in Turkey. The findings indicate that perceptions of brand communications and service/product quality can be viewed as antecedents to brand trust, in turn affects brand loyalty.

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1. Introduction

Brands as intangible assets are one of the most valuable assets that companies have. In this context, brand loyalty is at the heart of the marketing activities of firms. With intensified fragmentation, sophistication and competition of markets traditional manufacturers of brands are forced to be more concerned with the development and maintenance of long-term relationship with their consumers and therefore seeking to adopt relationship marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Rust, Zeithaml and Lemon, 2004).

Brand-loyal consumers may be willing to pay more for a brand (Jacoby and Chestnut 1998; Pessemier 1959; Reicheld 1996). This uniqueness may derive from brand communication, service quality brand trust and loyalty when customers interact and use the brand. Similarly, brand loyalty leads to greater market share when the same brand is repeatedly purchased by loyal consumers (Assael 1998). Furthermore, because of various affective factors, loyal consumers may use more of the brand - that is, may like using the brand or identify with its image (Upshaw 1995). In summary, superior brand performance outcomes

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and customer-brand relationship constructs such as brand trust and loyalty may result from brand communication and service quality. This loyalty, in turn, may be determined by trust, communication, and service quality in the brand.

The present study explores the relationship among brand communication and service quality in a relational context with an emphasis on understanding of the linking role of brand trust and loyalty. In what follows, we begin by defining the constructs of our interest and developing a model of the relationship among these constructs. To develop our hypotheses, we draw from the new and emerging concepts of relationship marketing. In this direction, we present the methods, measures, and results of the surveys designed to test the hypotheses of interest.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1. Brand Communication

Schultz (1998) has argued that the brand is the very key to integrated marketing. The brand, in increasingly, is the central core or hub of what consumers want, need, and consider to be value. And, it is the brand with which customers and consumers have ongoing relationships. The objective of brand communication has been to expose the audience to a brand, whereby the effect can be maximized in terms of increased awareness and higher recall, so that the customer will buy the brand which has the highest recall; and to satisfy the customer to the optimum level. Any exposure to the brand communication affects consumer response, which can be measured by analyzing variables like brand awareness in terms of recall and recognition, favorability, strength and uniqueness of the brand associations in the consumer memory. These dimensions affect other characteristics of brand congruity and relationships among the brand associations in consumer memory for building a positive image. (Panda, 2004, p.9).

Brand communication is the primary integrative element in managing brand relationships with customers, employees, suppliers, channel members, the media, government regulators, and community. Brand communication should aim to enhance brand loyalty by making consumer more attached to the brand in order to strengthen the consumer's brand relationship over time (Pearson, 1996; Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). Brand communication is the most important factor for successfully launching a new service. The key is to 'tangibilize' service concepts, particularly those that are new to the world" (Terrill, 1992, p. 25). Defined as "the consumer's overall evaluation of a brand whether good or bad" (Low and Lamb, 2000, p. 352), brand attitudes encapsulate the meaning that consumers attach to brands, which in turn effects their purchasing behaviour (Low and Lamb, 2000). Positive brand attitudes such as brand trust and loyalty are vital to the long-term success and sustainability of brands (Hoek et al, 2000). As such, astute marketers expend considerable effort on creating and maintaining positive attitudes towards their brands and this is usually achieved through the brand's communications. Brand communication has been consistently found to play an important role in creating positive brand attitudes (Kempf and Smith, 1998). The ability of brand names to evoke feelings such as trust, confidence and the like (Turley and Moore, 1995) indicates that brand names should not be overlooked as a valid and useful avenue of communication in the creation of brand attitudes. (Grace and O'Cass, 2005, p.107). Based on these findings the following hypotheses are suggested:

H1; Brand communication has a significantly positive effect on brand trust.

2.2. Service Quality

Service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of elements of service such as interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality. These elements are in turn evaluated based on specific service quality dimensions; reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy

and tangibles. Service quality is defined as global judgment or attitude relation to the overall excellence or superiority of the service (Parasuraman et al, 1988). It has also been defined as "the degree of discrepancy between customers' normative expectations for the service and their perceptions of the service performance" (Parasuraman et al, 1988). Gronroos (1984) defined service quality perceived judgments, resulting from an evaluation process where customers compare their expectations with the service they perceive to have received. He further split service quality into two-technical quality (what is done) and functional quality (how is done).

Little empirical research has focused explicitly on the relationship between service quality, brand trust and loyalty. With regards to behavioral intentions in a service settings, Zeithaml et al.(1996) proposed a comprehensive, multi-dimensional framework of customer behavioral intentions in services. This framework was initially comprised of the following four main dimensions: word-of-mouth communications, purchase intention, price sensitivity and complaining behavior. The above discussions suggest the following hypotheses:

H2; Service quality is positively correlated with brand trust.

2.3. *Brand Trust*

We define brand trust as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Moorman et al 1993, p. 315). This definition spans the two general approaches to trust in the literature (Dwyer and LaGace., 1986). First, trust has been viewed as a belief, sentiment, or expectation about an exchange partner's trustworthiness that results from the partner's expertise, reliability, or expectation about an exchange partner's trustworthiness that results from the partner's expertise, reliability, or intentionality. Second, trust has been viewed as a behavioral intention or behavior that reflects a reliance on a partner and involves vulnerability and uncertainty on the part of trustee (Moorman et al 1993, p. 315).

Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) and Doney and Cannon (1997) both also stress that the notion of trust is only relevant in situations of uncertainty (e.g., when greater versus lesser differences among brands occur). Specifically, trust reduces the uncertainty in an environment in which consumers feel especially vulnerable because they know they can rely on the trusted brand. Doney and Cannon (1997, p. 37) suggest that the construct of trust involves a "calculative process" based on the ability of an object or party (e.g., a brand) to continue to meet its obligations and on an estimation of the costs versus rewards of staying in the relationship. At the same time, Doney and Cannon point out that trust involves an inference regarding the benevolence of the firm to act in the best interests of the customer based on shared goals and values. Thus, beliefs about reliability, safety, and honesty are all important facets of trust that people incorporate in their operationalization of trust, as we discuss subsequently. Overall, we view brand trust as involving a process that is well thought out and carefully considered, whereas the development of brand affect is more spontaneous, more immediate, and less deliberately reasoned in nature.

Brand trust leads to brand loyalty or commitment because trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued (Morgan and Hunt 1994, Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Indeed, commitment has been defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande 1992, p. 316). Thus, loyalty or commitment underlies the ongoing process of continuing and maintaining a valued and important relationship that has been created by trust. In other words, trust and commitment should be associated, because trust is important in relational exchanges and commitment is also reserved for such valued relationships. In this connection, Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) find that trust leads to commitment in business-to-business relational exchanges. Thus, we suggest that brand trust will contribute to both purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Trusted brands

should be purchased more often and should evoke a higher degree of attitudinal commitment. Based on these findings the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3; Brand trust positively correlated with brand loyalty

2.4. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a prerequisite for a firm's competitiveness and profitability (Aaker, 1995, 1997; Reichheld, Markey, and Hopton, 2000). Every firm desires to have its brands with high customer loyalty. Unfortunately, all brands cannot attract high loyalty. The development and maintenance of consumer brand loyalty is placed at the heart of companies' marketing plans, especially in the face of highly competitive markets with increasing unpredictability and reducing product differentiation (Fournier and Yao, 1997, p.90).

The importance of brand loyalty has been recognized in the marketing literature for at least three decades (Howard and Sheth 1969, p.232). In this connection, Aaker (1991) has discussed the role of loyalty in the brand equity process and has specifically noted that brand loyalty leads to certain marketing advantages such as reduced, marketing costs, more new customers, and greater trade leverage. In addition Dick and Basu (1994) suggest other loyalty-related marketing advantages, such as favorable word of mouth and greater resistance among loyal consumers to competitive strategies. Yet despite the clear managerial relevance of brand loyalty, conceptual and empirical gaps remain. Specifically, with some exceptions (Oliver 1999; Zeithamly, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996), our conceptualizations of brand loyalty emphasize only the behavioral dimension of that concept, thereby neglecting its attitudinal components and its relationship with other variables at both the consumer and market levels.

Brand loyalty is a consumer's preference to buy a single brand name in a product class; it is a result of the perceived quality of the brand and not its price (Chaudri, 1999, p.137). Brand loyalty may be indicated by brand attitudes and habit (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973), it is also conceptually distinct from either attitudes or habits. It is widely considered that loyalty is one of the ways with which the consumer express his/her satisfaction with the performance of the product or service received (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995; Ballester and Aleman, 2001).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Model

The research model guiding this research is depicted in Figure 1. The proposed model draws from the diverse research. The research model in Figure 1 posits the brand communication and service quality build brand loyalty through brand trust.

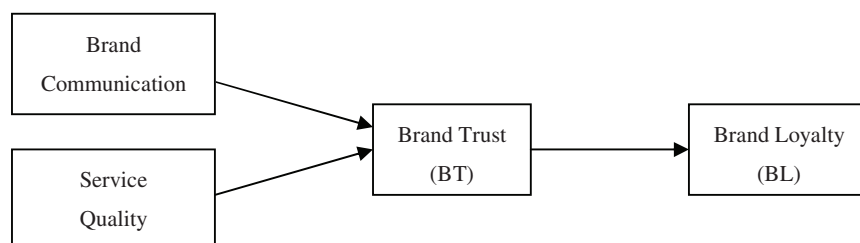


Figure 1 Research Model

3.2. Measures

The constructs in our study were developed by using measurement scales adopted from prior studies. Modifications were made to the scale to fit the purpose of the study. All constructs were measured using five-point likert scales with anchors strongly disagree (= 1) and strongly agree (= 5). All items were positively worded. Items for measuring the brand communication were adopted from previous audience studies (Grace and O'Cass 2005; Fullerton 2005). The brand communication measures were adopted from previous studies (Yi and Suna, 2004; Grace and O'Cass, 2005). The service quality measures were adapted from previous studies (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Parasuraman et al, 1988; Terblanche and Boshoff, 2001). The brand trust measures were adapted from a variety of sources (Hsteh and Hiang 2004; Caceres and Paparoidamis 2007; Ballester and Aleman-Munuera 2001; Dixon, Bridson, Evans and Morrison 2005; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001, etc.). The brand loyalty measures were adapted from previous studies (Algesheimer, Uptal and Herrmann, 2005; Fullerton, 2005; Heithman, Lehman, and Herrmann, 2007; Hess and Story, 2005; Johnson, Herrmann and Huber, 2006; Sierra and McQuity, 2005; Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuman, 1996).

3.3. Data Gathering

Overall consideration, automotive industry was selected as the relational exchange context for this research. Data were collected through random questionnaires consumers. The sampling frames consist of randomly selected 258 consumers. The study was based on the development and administration of a self-administered survey and conducted in Turkey.

3.4. Sample

Sample was randomly drawn form the population of consumers who reside within the metropolitan area of a large city in Istanbul, Turkey. Random sample includes consumers who may lie anywhere on the transactional-relational continuum with the global automotive brands.

Table 1 presents the description of respondents. The respondents were asked to report their demographic information, including gender, age, marital status and education. The respondents were predominantly males (77,6%). The median age group of the respondent was 28 to 40 years (56,6%). More than half of the respondents who answered the question indicated education as university (61,3%).

Table 1 Description of the Respondents

VARIABLES		Frequency (Number of People)	Ratio (%)
AGE	17-27	41	15,9
	28-40	146	56,6
	41 and older	71	27,5
GENDER	Woman	57	22,4
	Man	198	77,6
MARITAL STATUS	Married	198	76,7
	Single	60	23,3

EDUCATION	Primary School	30	11,7
	High School	54	21,1
	University	157	61,3
	Graduate	15	5,9

3.5. Factor Analysis and Reliability

The scales were submitted to exploratory factor analysis separately. The best fit of the data was obtained with a principal component analysis with a varimax rotation. There are; six items for brand communication, ten items for service quality, eight items brand trust and fourteen items for brand loyalty. The factor loadings of brand communication, service quality, brand trust, brand loyalty are seen in Table 2. The four factors captured all of the variance with 26%, 17%, 16% and 11% of the variance respectively. For exploratory research, a Chronbach α greater than 0.70 is generally considerate reliable (Nunnally, 1978). Chronbach α statistics for the study contracts are 0.88, 0.93, 0.94 and 0.96 for each of the four factors respectively.

Table 2 Factor analysis

Measures	Model Constructs			
	Brand Communication	Service Quality	Brand Trust	Brand Loyalty
I react favorably to the advertising and promotions of this brand	,809			
I feel positive toward the advertising and promotions of this brand	,824			
The advertising and promotions of this brand are good	,706			
The advertising and promotions of this brand do good job	,784			
I am happy with the advertising and promotions of this brand	,723			
I like the advertising and promotions of this brand	,746			
This brand provides superior service		,746		
This brand offers excellent service		,807		
I have always excellent experience when I use this brand		,755		
I feel good about what this brand offers to its customers		,752		
Overall, I would say the quality of my interaction with this brand's employees is excellent		,758		
I would say that the quality of my interaction with this brand's employees is high		,737		
I would say this brand's physical environment is one of the best in its industry.		,605		
I would rate this brand's physical environment highly.		,602		
This brand has fair system for the handling of complaints		,526		
This brand's staff efficiently deal with customer complaints		,452		
X meets my expectations.			,669	
I feel confident in X			,632	
X never disappoints me			,541	
X guarantees satisfaction			,690	
X would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns			,661	
I could rely on X to solve the problem			,700	
X would make any effort to satisfy me			,751	
X would compensate me in some way for the problem with the product			,724	
I intend to buy this brand in the near future				,742
I intend to buy other products of this brand				,755
I consider this brand as my first choice in this category				,744
The next time I need that product, I will buy the same brand				,821
I will continue to be loyal customer for this brand				,798
I am willing to pay a price premium over competing products to be able to purchase this brand again.				,722
I would only consider purchasing this brand again, if it would be substantially cheaper				,686
Commercials regarding to competing brands are not able to reduce my interest in buying this brand.				,699
I say positive things about this brand to other people				,764
I recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice				,765

I intend to recommend this brand to other people				,779
I consider this brand my first choice in the next few years				,757
They carry products I am looking for				,730
I get good value for my money				,636

Total Explained Variance: %70

3.6. Correlation analysis

We computed means and standard deviations for each variable and created a correlation matrix of all variables used in hypothesis testing. Means, Standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among all scales used in the analyses are shown in Table 3. In this manner, we may claim that there are positive relationships between variables according to the related Table 3. After analyzing the Table 3, we may see that the relations between brand communication, service quality, brand trust and brand loyalty have positive correlations in the level of $P < 0.01$.

Table 3 Correlation analysis

		Mean	S.D.	Cronbach α	1	2	3
1	Brand Communication	3,70	,83	0,88			
2	Service Quality	3,45	,89	0,93	,414(*)		
3	Brand Trust	3,70	,87	0,94	,407(*)	,797(*)	
4	Brand Loyalty	3,41	,99	0,96	,394(*)	,701(*)	,765(*)

* $P < 0,01$

3.7. Regression Analysis

We have applied regression analysis via SPSS. Brand communication and service quality are independent variable and brand trust is dependent variable. The regression model I was statistically significant ($F = 228.632$; $R^2 = .642$; $P = .000$). Regression analysis indicated that, brand communication had significantly positive effect on brand trust ($p < 0,05$; $\beta = 0,092$). Thus, H1, proposing that brand communication is positively related to brand trust, was supported by our study. The other result is service quality had significantly positive effect on brand trust ($p < 0,01$; $\beta = 0,758$). Hence the hypothesis H2 was also supported by the study. The data of constructed regression method may be seen on Table 4.

In addition, brand trust had significantly positively correlated with brand loyalty ($P < 0.01$). Therefore H3 was supported (Table 3).

Table 4 Brand communication, service quality and brand trust regression analysis

Model I Brand Loyalty		
	Beta	Sig.
Brand Communication	,092	,026**
Service Quality	,758	,000*
R^2	0,642	
F	228,632	
$Sig.$,000	

** $P < 0,05$

* $P < 0,01$

3.8. Mediating Effect

The result of regression equation required to test the mediation model are shown in table 5. The regression model II and model III was statistically significant ($F = 130,086$; $R^2 = .505$; $P = .000$; $F = 134,218$; $R^2 = .613$; $P = .000$). Baron and Kenny (1986) suggested that the model fulfill the following four conditions: (1) the relationship between the independent variable (brand communication) and the mediating variable (brand trust) needs to be significant; (2) the relationship between the independent variable (brand communication) and the dependent variable (brand loyalty) needs to be significant; (3) the relationship between the mediating variable (brand trust) and the dependent variable (brand loyalty) needs to be significant; (4) simultaneously, the independent variable (brand communication) with the mediating variable (brand trust) to the dependent variable. Table 4 shows that the results of statistic analysis fulfill these four conditions. Under the fourth condition, “brand communication” to “brand loyalty does not reach the significant level of $p < 0.05$. Consequently, “brand trust” have full mediating effects on the relationship between “brand communication” and “brand loyalty”

Table 5 Brand communication, service quality, brand trust and brand loyalty regression analysis

Model II Brand Loyalty			Model III Brand Loyalty	
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	Sig.
Brand Communication	,125	,010*	,075	,086
Service Quality	,649	,000*	,233	,000*
Brand Trust			,550	,000*
R^2	0,505		0,613	
F	130,086		134,218	
$Sig.$,000		,000	

* $P < 0,01$

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has suggested what is possible, practical, and can be done by marketers in terms of brand communication, service quality, brand trust and brand loyalty. Brand communication has positive effects on brand trust. This finding is supported by Grace and O’Cass (2005); Terrill, (1992); Low and Lamb, (2000). Brand communication creates and develops trust-based relationship platform

between brand and customer. Service quality has positive effects on brand trust. This finding has also supported by Parasuraman et al (1988). Brand trust has positive effects on brand loyalty. This result is consistent with that of Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992); Morgan and Hunt (1994). According to the above analysis brand trust have full mediating effects on the relationship between brand communication and brand loyalty.

This study contributes to the relationship marketing literature in three significant respects. First, the study integrates the concept of brand communication, service/product quality, brand trust, and loyalty. Earlier studies rarely examined the role of brand communication and service/product quality perceptions in shaping brand trust and loyalty relationships with customers. Secondly, the present study demonstrates the benefits of brand communication and service quality in creating brand trust and loyalty. Also this present study demonstrates the benefits of investing in relationships based on service quality, brand communication, trust and loyalty. The main objectives of this survey were; to merge the concepts of service/product quality, brand communication, brand trust and loyalty with in an integrated model; and to test this model empirically. The results indicate that perceptions of brand communications and service/product quality can be viewed a antecedents to brand trust, in turn affects brand loyalty. Finally, this paper has suggested ways of how to develop brand loyalty and trust in a relational context with brand communication and service quality.

This study was designed to investigate the effects of brand communication, service quality on brand loyalty through in durable goods industries (e.g. the automobile industry). Automobile industry was chosen for several reasons. First brand involvement is very high in automobile brands. Second, brand communication expenses are very high in automobile sector. Third, service quality is very important for automobile customers. Fourth, brand trust and loyalty are very important for the automobile manufacturers. Understanding and managing brand loyalty is especially important in durable goods industries (e.g. the automobile industry), in which products involve large profit margins on the hand but involve long placement cycles for buyers on the other hand. The latter issue makes it challenging for automobile manufacturers to ensure that consumers will repeat-purchase within the same company when it is time to replace their automobile (Che and Seetharaman, 2009).

5. Limitations and Future Direction

The current research indicates strong empirical support for the relationships among brand communication, service quality, brand trust, and brand loyalty. The primary limitation of this research is that it explores only two product/service categories, potentially limiting the generalizability to other domains. In general, these findings should be replicated with different product categories and brands. Also, the present study did not examine personal factors, brand involvement and brand personality. Overall, we still need to develop a more detailed understanding of the relationship between brand loyalty and other relationship marketing related variables such as brand experience. Brand experience conceptualization and scale development are very important for understanding and managing brand trust and loyalty concepts (Brakus et al, 2009).

Furthermore, additional measures of brand communication, service quality, brand trust and loyalty should be developed, which would lead to a better explanation of brand and customer relationship outcomes. Despite the importance of the concept, brand loyalty measurement has not flourished in the marketing literature (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

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